

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 535

PS 031 500

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TITLE High/Scope Preschool Key Experiences: Initiative and Social Relations. [with] Curriculum Videotape.

INSTITUTION High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, MI.

ISBN ISBN-1-57379-165-2

PUB DATE 2002-00-00

NOTE 34p.; Videotape - ISBN-1-57379-166-0. For additional booklets and videos in the High/Scope Preschool Key Experiences Series, see ED 441 562, PS 031 455, and PS 031 499.

AVAILABLE FROM High/Scope Press, 600 North River Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48198-2898 (\$9.95, book FF-P1181; \$30.95, video FF-P1182; \$34.95, set FF-P1183SET). Tel: 800-40-PRESS (Toll Free); Tel: 734-485-2000; Fax: 800-442-4FAX (Toll Free); Fax: 734-485-0704; e-mail: pressstaff@highscope.org; Web site: <http://www.highscope.org>.

PUB TYPE Non-Print Media (100) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS

DESCRIPTORS Adult Child Relationship; Classroom Techniques; Conflict; Cooperation; Early Experience; *Interpersonal Competence; *Parent Child Relationship; Peer Relationship; Planning; Play; *Preschool Children; *Preschool Curriculum; Preschool Education; Problem Solving; Self Expression; Skill Development; *Social Development; Student Participation; *Teacher Student Relationship; Videotape Recordings

IDENTIFIERS *High Scope Model

ABSTRACT

As preschoolers develop the ability to carry out their ideas and play alone and with others, they are developing the foundation for social competence. This booklet and a companion videotape help teachers and parents recognize and support nine High/Scope key experiences in initiative and social relations: (1) making and expressing choices, plans, and decisions; (2) solving problems in play; (3) taking care of one's needs; (4) expressing feelings in words; (5) participating in group routines; (6) being sensitive to feelings, interests, and needs of others; (7) building relationships with children and adults; (8) creating and experiencing collaborative play; and (9) dealing with social conflict. The booklet discusses each key experience, delineates ways teachers and parents can support children in skill development, and includes a teacher strategy checklist. The 58-minute videotape highlights strategies to support children in developing initiative and social relations abilities. In the first part of the videotape, the narrator introduces each of the key experiences, illustrated with footage of children and teachers in a variety of High/Scope classrooms designed to help viewers identify key experiences and increase awareness of strategies, such as imitating children's actions, and encouraging children to reflect on what they are doing or develop their ideas further. The second part of the videotape shows four extended video scenes from High/Scope classrooms without narration as in-depth examples of how key experiences unfold in everyday play situations. Each scene shows adults responding to children as they initiate play ideas, encounter problems, and interact with peers. The accompanying viewer guide describes the videotape content, provides a checklist of teacher strategies, and lists additional resources. (KB)

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- Vogel, N. (2001). *Making the Most of Plan-Do-Review: The Teacher's Idea Book 5*.

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Published by

HIGH/SCOPE® PRESS

A division of the High/Scope® Educational Research Foundation
600 North River Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198-2898

Orders: 1-800-40-PRESS, 1-800-442-4FAX; Web site: www.highscope.org

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The booklets in this series are adapted from sections of *Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs*, 2nd ed., by Mary Hohmann and David P. Weikart, High/Scope Press, 2002.

*Michelle Graves, Booklet Writer; Nancy Brickman, Editor;
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Photographs:

Gregory Fox: Cover, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 (top), 14 (right), 15, 16 (right), 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

Patricia Evans: 12 (bottom), 13, 14 (left), 16 (left, top and bottom), 25, 26, 27

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Graves, Michelle, 1952-

High/Scope's preschool key experiences. Initiative and social relations / [Michelle Graves, booklet writer ; Nancy Brickman, editor].
p. cm.

Adapted from *Educating young children* / Mary Hohmann and David P. Weikart.

ISBN 1-57379-165-2 (softcover : alk. paper)

1. Early childhood education--Social aspects--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Child development--Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title. Initiative and social relations. II. Brickman, Nancy Altman. III. Hohmann, Mary. Educating young children. IV. Title.

LB1139.23 G73 2002

372.21--dc21



2002002581

Printed in the United States of America

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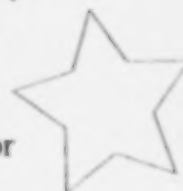
Initiative and Social Relations Key Experiences

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What are initiative and social relations for preschoolers?

The skills of initiative and social relations—making plans, following through on plans, thinking back on our actions and decisions, and having positive relationships with others—are used by most of us on an everyday basis. As preschoolers grow in their ability to carry out their ideas and play alone and with others, they are developing important life skills.

These skills are the foundations for **social competence**.



Key Experiences

Initiative and Social Relations

- ☆ Making and expressing choices, plans, and decisions
- ☆ Solving problems encountered in play
- ☆ Taking care of one's own needs
- ☆ Expressing feelings in words
- ☆ Participating in group routines
- ☆ Being sensitive to the feelings, interests, and needs of others
- ☆ Building relationships with children and adults
- ☆ Creating and experiencing collaborative play
- ☆ Dealing with social conflict

Preschool children's behavior often reflects both their own personal interests and their need to work and play with others. Balancing the need to work on goals independently with the desire to have friends and be part of a group is no easy task at any age, and it is especially challenging for preschoolers. Young children rely on adults to guide them through this balancing process. Children need repeated practice, supported by adults, in making decisions and understanding the impact they have on others. With this support and experience, young children can be very successful in acting on their own interests, in using their unique strengths, and in making healthy decisions about themselves and those in their home, school, and community.

High/Scope's nine key experiences in initiative and social relations provide a framework that helps adults understand and support children as they take initiative, develop self-awareness, and learn to understand and relate to others. In the pages that follow, we discuss each key experience and provide suggestions for encouraging each one.



When adults provide opportunities and space for children to play together, the complexity of their play expands and their social skills flourish. Children's social abilities and their capacity for initiative are interrelated; development in one area stimulates development in the other.



*Taking initiative means following through on what **you** want to do.*



Key Experience

☆ Making and expressing choices, plans, and decisions

Children are naturally curious about their surroundings. Infants will gaze at moving objects, turn their heads to listen to sounds, and grab for the glasses or hair of a parent or caregiver who is holding them. Preschool children are just as curious, and with their increased physical, verbal, and social skills, they are very motivated to pursue whatever interests them. In the process, they take charge of their activities and begin to make choices, plans, and decisions. As they follow their interests, preschoolers not only learn about the physical world but also about themselves and others. Through repeated chances to take charge, they gain confidence in their

abilities and learn to see ways that they can coordinate their efforts with others.

Examples of children

Making and expressing choices, plans, and decisions

- Audrey comes into preschool and announces, "My mom is thirty-seven today. I'm going to make her a birthday card." She spends the first 30 minutes of work time in the art area, creating a card decorated with flowers and the word Mom written inside a purple heart.
- Bing and Dali make a structure out of big blocks during work time. When it is completed, Dali says to Bing, "Let's ask Elliot to be the driver."
- As children are dancing with streamers (a large-group activity), four children connect their streamers to form a circle. They jump together. Other children throw their streamers in the air and catch them as they float down, while others hold them above their heads and sway to the music.



This child's concentration and careful effort reflects his strong interest in a project that stems from his own choices.

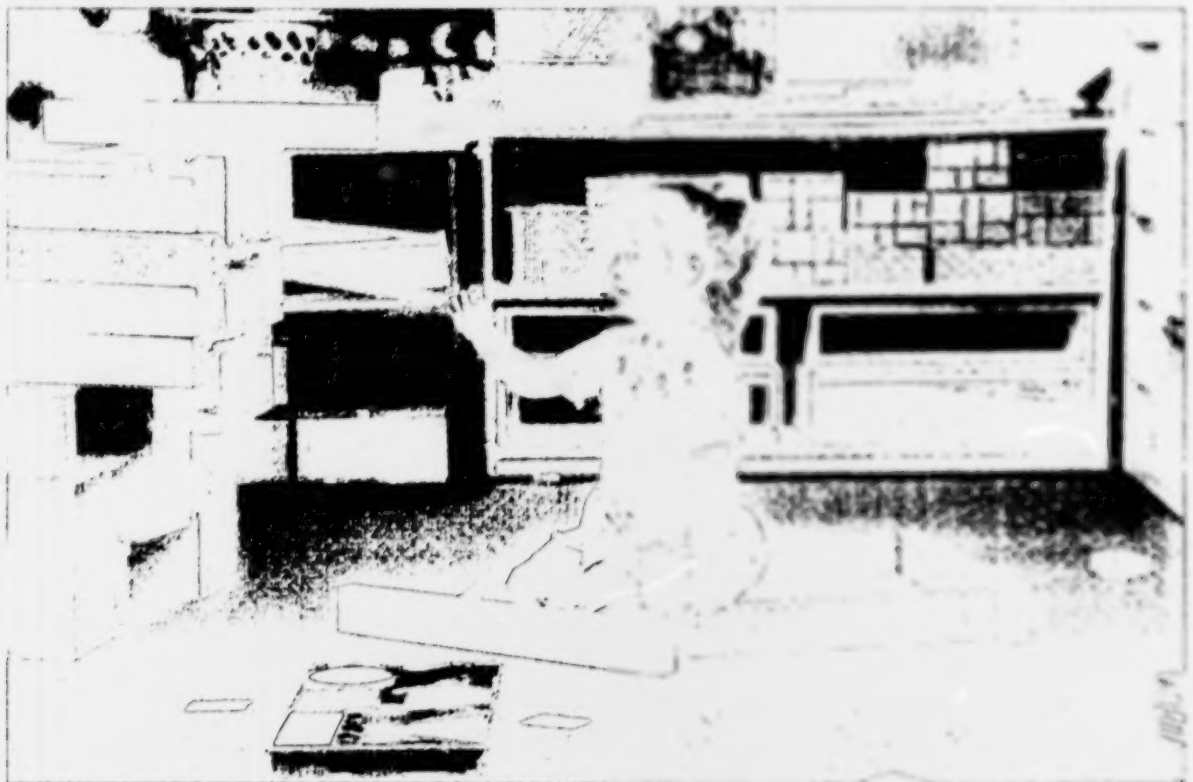
Ways to support children in making and expressing choices, plans and decisions

➤ **Establish an environment and a routine that invite children to pursue their individual interests and goals.**

Make sure that there are many play choices both indoors and outdoors at your center and that play spaces and toys are well organized so children can carry out their plans independently. Some suggestions:

- **Offer a variety of open-ended materials** (materials that can be used in many different ways). Materials such as blocks, art materials, button collections, dress-up clothes, and old cookware invite children to think of their own plans and play ideas.

- **Store materials and toys so they are easy for children to find, use, and return**, for example, in labeled containers on child-level shelves.



Providing a range of materials to choose from and storing them so they are well organized, visible, and easy to reach gives children a sense of control and independence. This kind of setting encourages them to be active, purposeful "doers."

- Create cozy spaces where children can work alone and larger areas where children can work together.

- Maintain a predictable routine for children that includes the plan-do-review sequence—this gives them daily practice in making plans, carrying them out, and recalling how their ideas worked.

▶ *Help children be aware of the value of the decisions you see them making.*

Repeat what children say or describe what they are doing—this sends a message that you are genuinely interested in their ideas. Match their enthusiasm level when they discover bugs on a log, how blocks balance, or the sound a coffee can makes when tapped with a wooden spoon. Have real conversations with them about their discoveries and ideas. When you play with them, be a play partner, not a play leader. Follow *their* ideas.



The teacher shows the value she places on this child's decisions by encouraging him to tell her about his picture and by making descriptive comments: "I see some red dots here and some wavy lines."

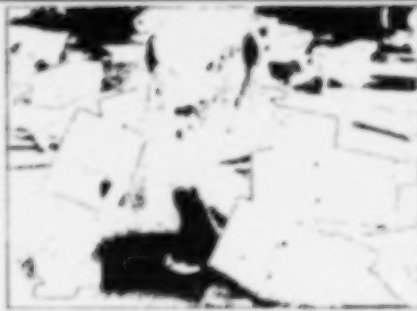
▶ *Be consistent in the message you send children about the importance of decision making.*

Give them adequate time to pursue their ideas and to experience the consequences of their decisions. Recognize that decision making is important *throughout the entire*



Even during teacher planned parts of the routine, like this small group time, children's choices are respected. The teacher provides similar sets of materials—clay, small rolling pins, long plastic pieces, Styrofoam balls—children decide what to do with them.

day, even during group activities that adults have planned. During small-group activities, don't expect all the children to use the materials you provide in the same way. During large-group times, encourage children to add verses to songs, to decide how to move to music, and to figure out whom they want to sit by and how they want to sit.



Key Experience

☆ Solving problems encountered in play

As children pursue their own interests and ideas, they will encounter obstacles and roadblocks. A pretend fire engine may be too noisy for children listening to a story nearby, a block tower may tumble down before the building is complete, or a computer program may freeze midstream. Children's ability to deal thoughtfully and creatively with these unexpected problems develops with practice.

They need experience in trying out

Examples of children solving problems encountered in play

- As Kodah uses masking tape to attach his "power bracelet" to his wrist, the tape clumps together until it looks like a ball hanging from his arm. He takes a pair of scissors over to his friend Michael and asks him to cut the clump off.
- While making invitations to attend her "wedding," Elena shouts across the room to ask her teacher how to spell her classmates' names. After spelling two names, her teacher suggests she look around the room to see if there is a place where she can find the children's names and symbols. Elena thinks for a moment, then takes her invitations and markers to the greeting area, where she copies names from children's individual cubby spaces.
- "You already had a turn to pass out the snack basket. I want a turn next," says Elliot as Myles starts to write his name on the snack chart job list. "How 'bout if we do it together," Myles suggests. "Okay," replies Elliot, "but next time I do it alone."



Solving the problem of handling a long piece of sticky tape is easier when you have a friend to help.

solutions, even when the solutions do not work. Adults can help children develop their problem-solving abilities by encouraging them to solve meaningful problems like these as independently as possible, rather than by taking over for them or by setting up artificial problems.



At cleanup time, children learn from each other as they solve various problems: Which material fits here? How can I carry a big stack of blocks?



Engaging, flexible materials with many uses—like long cloth streamers wrapped around wands—present many opportunities for problem solving.

Ways to support children in solving problems encountered in play

Resist the urge to solve children's problems for them, or to state your opinion about how a problem should be solved.

In the child examples on page 7, it would be all too easy for the adult to take over: to instruct Kodah in the proper use of masking tape, to continue to spell the names for Elena, or to tell Myles it really *is* Elliot's turn to pass out the snack on his own. Instead, the adult provides prompting and encouragement as needed and waits until the children resolve their problems independently.

Give children the opportunity to recognize and describe the problems they encounter.

It takes time for children to become aware that they have a problem and to decide what needs to be done next. Encourage children to show or tell you what isn't working and what keeps them from reaching their goals. Add your own observations or acknowledgments. A simple statement like "Elena, you really want to write all your friend's names but you need help with the spelling," may be enough to inspire her to find her own solution.



Children's confidence grows when adults stand back and let them solve their own problems.

Step in to help children who don't recognize problems they face or those that seem frustrated and ready to abandon their ideas.

Saying things like "I notice you walked away when the paint pump wouldn't work. We can work together to help you get started," provides support to a child who may not yet see that problems can be pursued in a variety of ways. If the child has tried various ideas (pumping harder, wiping the pump with a wet paper towel, or trying to unscrew the top) without success, he or she may need more than just a little patient prompting. In these cases, it may be necessary to offer more information or even a solution ("Maybe the pump is clogged" or "The pump is clogged—we have to poke a hole through it"). This kind of help is most appropriate when it seems like children have exhausted all their possibilities and are ready to give up.



Key Experience

☆ Taking care of one's own needs

One way for young children to take initiative is by taking care of their own needs. By dressing themselves, helping with snacks or meals, and cleaning up after themselves, they are taking control of their own lives. Taking care of their own emotional needs, such as comforting themselves when they are upset, is another aspect of this key experience. When adults encourage children to do things for themselves, children's

confidence in their own abilities grows, and they learn that they can use their new skills to help others.

Examples of children

Taking care of one's own needs

- At snack time Zachary pours his own juice. It tips over, spilling on the table and soaking his cracker pile. He leaves the table, returning a moment later with a stack of paper towels. He uses some of them to wipe the table top, then gets some fresh crackers and sets them on the rest of the towels.
- When Mariah realizes her mittens are not inside her backpack on a crisp fall morning, she says to her teacher, "Oh, that's okay." Thinking Mariah will just go outside without them, her teacher is surprised to see her go to her cubby, take out a pair of extra socks, and use them to keep her hands warm.
- After watching his friend Ofelia bump her knee into the table edge, Adam goes to the refrigerator and comes back with an ice pack. "Here, put this on the bad spot," he says, handing it to her.



An adult could dress the child more quickly, but the child would lose an opportunity to gain skills and self reliance.

Ways to support children in taking care of their own needs

Give children plenty of time and your patience as they try out new things.

Stay focused on their accomplishments—cleaning up after snack or putting on a pair of snow boots—rather than on the crumbs that are left on the table or the fact that the boots are on the wrong feet.

Give children chances to practice using tools and to participate in everyday chores.

For some adults, sweeping floors, cleaning paintbrushes, weeding the garden, raking leaves, and refilling the staplers are chores that are necessary, but not necessarily enjoyable. For many children, however, these jobs are fun. Plus, helping out in these ways makes them feel important and provides a chance for them to be independent.



Helping out at snack time helps children feel important and make them less dependent on adults.

Recognize and accept the various ways children take care of their own and other people's emotional needs.

Some children use blankets or pacifiers to comfort themselves, while others cling to adult laps or legs. Other children use words, and still others, exaggerated noises and motions, like loud grunts or stomping feet. It's important to understand that all these ways of dealing with emotional needs help children gain self-control and learn concrete, responsible ways of finding comfort.



Key Experience

☆ Expressing feelings in words

Just as children need to learn the words for all kinds of objects, they also need to learn the words for feelings. Adults can help children acquire these terms by naming and describing any strong feelings the child is experiencing. At the same time, adults can convey their understanding of the feelings through their gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. A hug, a return smile, a pat on the shoulder, or a sad voice tone are all ways to convey understanding.

Making the connection between feelings and the words that describe those feelings is a major achievement for young children. As children talk about and describe their feelings, they are increasing their self-awareness, which helps them gain control over their emotions and decide how to act on them.

Examples of children Expressing feelings in words

- On his first day at his preschool, Zachary puts his arms around his dad's neck and repeats several times, "I'm scared."
- After learning at message board time that Irene's father is coming in at snack to make sushi with the children, Eli crawls into his mother's lap and says he wants to go home. When Rosie, the classroom teacher, tells him that graham crackers and milk will also be served at snack, he gets up from his mother's lap and says, "Okay, now I don't have to worry."
- When Kacey comes to school in shiny new shoes, Amanda says, "It's not fair. I want shoes like Kacey's."



Children feel free talking about their feelings when adults create a supportive climate by responding sensitively to their upsets.

Ways to support children in expressing feelings in words

The most important thing adults can do to help children learn to attach words to their emotions is to create a supportive environment in which children feel free to talk about their feelings. The following strategies are helpful:

Acknowledge and accept children's feelings.

"Acknowledge" means simply to name children's feelings and, if possible, the reasons for them. This lets children know that their feelings are understood and accepted. While Zachary's scared feelings on the first day at a new school might seem surprising because he has been in school previously, it is still important for the adult to recognize that these feelings are very real for Zachary. A

simple comment to Zachary like "You're feeling scared, I know—It's hard to come to a new place" lets him know that it's okay to be frightened and helps him be aware that adults in the center are available for emotional support.



As she hears out each child in a dispute, the adult acknowledges the feelings they are expressing.

If a child is expressing feelings nonverbally, by crying or hitting, name the feeling for the child. If necessary, stop any hurtful behavior and set limits as you name the feeling.

For example, you might say, "You are feeling really sad that your mom has left for work" or "Hitting must stop—I can see you are feeling really angry—you really want the truck." When feelings are acknowledged in this way many times, children eventually learn to express feelings by using words rather than actions. They also learn that their strong feelings are accepted, even if their hurtful or destructive behaviors are not.

As you acknowledge children's feelings, make sure your voice tone, facial expressions, and gestures—as well as your words—reflect their emotions.

This lets children know that their feelings are understood and accepted. If you say "You are really upset" with a flat tone of voice or a blank facial expression, children will not feel you have really recognized their strong feelings.

Take the time to have conversations with children about those things that excite and concern them.

Lend an attentive ear, match your enthusiasm level with theirs, and offer a comforting lap when needed. Be sensitive to the many ways children express their feelings. For example, some children quietly withdraw when upset, while others may make up disturbing stories or act them out in pretend play. Respond to children's nonverbal ways of expressing feelings without passing judgment. Do not ignore or scold children who are pouting or crying loudly. By accepting these expressions and showing you understand the feelings behind them, you will help the child move toward expressing feelings in more mature ways.



These adults focus their full attention on the children, "tuning in" to their interests, needs, and concerns.



Key Experience

☆ Participating in group routines

Every preschool program includes repeated activities that happen every day. These include the regular events of the daily routine—group times, plan-do-review, naps, and so forth—and minor routines like brushing teeth or passing the snack basket. These group routines are important because they give children opportunities to practice their own decision-making skills while sharing a common experience with

others. Such experiences help to build children's positive social relationships and sense of community. As children mature in their abilities to reflect on past events and plan ahead for future activities, they enjoy being a part of personally meaningful routines in which they can actively participate.

Examples of children

Participating in group routines

- Near the end of snack time, Elena leaves the table and comes back with the snack chart. She erases the snack helper names for the day and writes her own name next to the symbol for passing out tomorrow's cups.
- Noelle completes her small-group-time work before the other children are finished. She puts her materials back in the basket and tells her teacher she'll wait in the book area until the others are ready to go outside.
- As children and adults are gathering for large-group time, Japera turns through the pages of the class song book (a teacher-made book in which the children's songs are represented with symbols). She finds the song she wants the group to sing that day, and puts a sticky note with her symbol on it next to the song.



Participating in daily planning is a meaningful routine that helps children organize their ideas. Using a computer mouse as a planning prop, this child indicates her plan to work in the art area

Ways to support children in participating in group routines

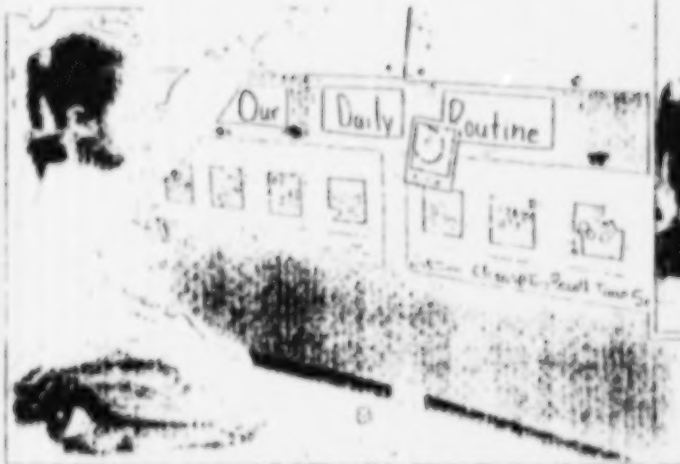
Provide consistent, predictable daily schedules and routines for children.

The routine should include times for the plan-do-review process, small- and large-group times, and outdoor play. These events should occur in the same sequence every day so children know what to expect. In addition to participating in these routine events, children may be expected to help with regular classroom chores and procedures. To encourage this, devise a system where children participate in

taking care of pets, passing out snack items, and cleaning and returning items to their labeled places.



High/Scope routines are consistent yet flexible; for example, small-group time (left and below) may always occur after lunch, but the content of the activity will change from day to day, and children are encouraged to be creative with the materials or experiences planned.



A picture chart of the daily routine helps the child remember which activity comes next.



Within these established routines and procedures, allow for variety in the ways children carry out their tasks, and encourage children to act on their own particular interests.

For example, it might be your regular routine to start the day with an informal reading time in the book area. During this time, you might expect that some children will look at books together, others will explore books individually, others will listen to parents or teachers reading stories, and still others may gather simply to talk.



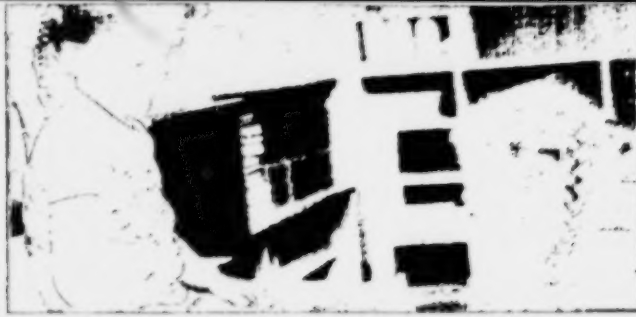
Children look at the snack chart to decide on the chores for the next day. Next to the chore they want, they write letters, symbols, or squiggles to indicate their names.

Be patient and understanding at the times when children do not join into established routines.

Think about the reasons why children might not be joining in, rather than thinking of the behavior as bad or noncompliant. If Kayla is sitting at the snack table finishing her snack while the rest of the group is starting large-group time, give her the freedom to eat at her own pace. To further create a sense of community and caring for others, ask other children to volunteer to help when their classmates are too tired, scared, upset, or worried to participate in a routine. If it's Zachery's first day and he is shy and nervous about following the routine, the teacher could ask another child to show him how to go to the snack table, go to the bathroom, and so forth.



A child lags behind as other children gather at the art table for the next activity. The teacher knows the child will probably join the group at her own pace, once the activity is under way.



Key Experience

☆ Being sensitive to the feelings, interests, and needs of others

Preschool children, in their short lives, have had many opportunities to feel emotions and observe emotional states in the people around them. Though it is natural for young children to be self-centered in their outlook, they are often capable of

acknowledging and supporting others who are experiencing a variety of emotions. They are most likely to show this developing sensitivity to others in situations where their own wants and needs are not in question. If adults continue to support them in noticing others' needs and feelings, they will develop the ability to consider other perspectives, even at times when their own emotions are strong.

Examples of children

Being sensitive to the feelings, interests, and needs of others

- On the third day of school, Mark watches Joshua standing near the door and crying as his father drops him off. Still upset, Joshua holds onto the door handle while the rest of the children in his group go to planning time. After five minutes of work time, Mark gets a motorcycle Joshua played with the day before and lays it on the floor near him.
- During snack time Erika mentions to Corrine that she saw and liked the movie *Toy Story* over the weekend. "If you liked *Toy Story*, you should watch *Toy Story 2*," says Corrine. "We have it, and you could come to my house," she adds.
- When Jolene bumps her knee on the playground, Zachary runs inside the classroom and comes back out with a Band-Aid.



Children are often very capable of providing comfort and support to each other.

Ways to support children in being sensitive to the feelings, interests, and needs of others

Create an atmosphere in which children see adults being warm, sensitive, and responsive to others.

This establishes a climate of trust in which children feel secure and safe. In this supportive climate, children will grow confident in expressing their own feelings, interests, and needs. In turn, they will become more responsive to other people.

When you observe children being sensitive to the needs of others, comment on what they are doing.

In the example of Joshua and Mark in the box at left, the teacher could acknowledge Mark's thoughtfulness: "Mark, I noticed you remembered something from yesterday that Joshua had a good time playing with." By these simple descriptions of children's efforts and the impact they have on others, you will strengthen their ability to be helpful and sensitive in future dealings with people.



Observing children's helpfulness, adults can make descriptive comments: "I noticed you helping Caitlin fasten her skirt." "You tied Sara's shoe."



For this child and any children looking on, this teacher is modeling skills that will help children be responsive to other people.





Key Experience

☆ Building relationships with children and adults

As children learn to trust in other people, to take initiative, and to be independent, they will seek to develop relationships outside of their immediate families. For preschool children, this is a major accomplishment that has many benefits. Playing with others, taking turns being the leader or follower, listening to and being heard by others, and negotiating and compromising are life-long social skills that are important to the well-being of both individuals and the community.

Examples of children Building relationships with children and adults

- As children gather for greeting circle, Myles tells the teacher he's going to wait to make his plan until Elliot comes. "He's my best friend," Myles explains.
- The day after a field trip to a pumpkin patch, Lauren tells her teacher she has "a good idea." "Let's send a card to the farmer for growing such big pumpkins."
- When Samantha calls for a teacher to help her with the computer at work time, Dali leaves the toy area and says, "I can help—I play this game at my house."



Learning to trust in relationships outside the family is a major step forward for preschoolers.

Ways to support children in building relationships with children and adults

Model kindness and respect when working with children.

If you are warm and respectful as you interact with children, children will imitate this positive approach as they interact with you and with others. Instead of quizzing, lecturing or "talking at" children, have genuine conversations with them in which you listen carefully to what they say and respond to them with honesty and interest. When you find children's behavior to be unkind or irritating, be firm about your expectations, but be careful not to punish or humiliate them.

Understand that building relationships takes time, effort, and consistency.

When you group adults and children for such events as planning, snack, and small-group times, keep the groupings stable for several months at a time, so children can count on regular interactions with familiar people.



Children's preferences for particular playmates, like their other choices and decisions, are encouraged in active learning settings.

Watch for relationships that are emerging in your setting.

Acknowledge children when they make the effort to share toys, sit together, or offer help to someone who has a need or a problem. When you see children answering other children's questions, expanding on other children's stories at recall time, and zipping up one another's coats, you will know that friendships are forming. When this happens, take a back seat, and let children be the leaders as they build relationships. You can also use the suggestions under the next key experience to provide social play opportunities that encourage children to form friendships.



Key Experience

☆ Creating and experiencing collaborative play

The ability to play cooperatively with others in pairs or small groups requires many skills for preschoolers: they must learn to think ahead with clear intentions, to work with others toward common goals, and to take the skills, ideas, and contributions of each person into consideration. In addition, playing cooperatively requires the ability

to deal with the conflicts that invariably arise when children have different viewpoints, experiences, and personalities. In spite of all the issues involved, the benefits of supporting collaborative play are great. As children participate in play experiences that center on common goals, they will begin to see that people have different thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. They will learn how to assert themselves, and the complexity of their play will increase. The success or failure of these efforts will have an important impact on how they approach future opportunities to work and play cooperatively.

Examples of children Creating and experiencing collaborative play

- Elana and Lauren make a plan to use dinosaur cards at work time. They begin by turning all the cards face down, then carefully take turns flipping over two at a time until they find matches. When all matches are complete, they count the number each has and declare a winner.
- At outside time Irene, Owen, and Eli work together filling buckets with pebbles. They carry, lift, and pour the pebbles down the side of a small slide. Occasionally they wait to pour until one of them can get to the top of the slide—that person then gets to ride down with the falling pebbles.
- Senetra and Amari make a plan to "get married" at work time. After dressing up, they stand side by side and ask their teacher to be the minister. When the pretend wedding is over, they go to the house area, make a play dough cake, set the table, and invite classmates to the party.

Ways to support children in creating and experiencing collaborative play

➤ *Choose materials for your classroom areas that children will find interesting.*

In the example at left, Elana's enthusiasm for dinosaurs and playing matching cards games at home with her older siblings paved the way for her interactions with Lauren.

➤ *To encourage children to play with others, provide multiple sets of the same materials (such as buckets and shovels) or large pieces of equipment that require or attract more than one child at a time.*

Materials such as a play house or a set of large, hollow blocks invite cooperative pretending. In addition, give children enough space in each play area to play with



With the right equipment, swinging becomes a cooperative activity. Negotiations over how to swing and whom to swing with are common.

classmates. Make sure there are periods in the daily routine when children have enough time to develop made-up games and complex pretend-play scenarios. Encourage children to work together with others at group times as well.

Watch for and support the play partnerships you see emerging.

Remember who plays together, for how long, and in what ways, and use this information to encourage children to develop their ideas for shared play. For example, if you have observed Abbie and Aysha playing doggie together all week, you might encourage them to make a plan together at planning time. With your support, they may think of ways to extend and develop their doggie play. Another way to support play partnerships is to enter into children's pretend play yourself, as one of the characters. If you do this, be sure to take a supporting role, instead of acting as the main character. This will help to insure that the play ideas continue to come from the children.

Plan large- and small-group times that invite cooperative play.

During the very hot days of summer, Sue planned a small-group time around buckets of soapy water, sponges, and two water hoses. The children in her group gathered around to wash her dirty car. The next day, the teachers conducted an open-ended story time in which children made up a story with accompanying actions about the car-washing experience.



On a hot day, having small-group time at the water table is fun for everyone. Afterwards, at outside time, children take buckets of water outdoors and continue with their cooperative water play.



Key Experience

☆ Dealing with social conflict

Handling social conflict successfully, to the satisfaction of all those involved, is an important life skill. Even though children's disputes can cause frustration, anger,

sadness, and confusion to all those involved, they are also an important opportunity for children to learn that there are many points of view and that the feelings of others are valid and important.

Children's disputes usually stem from disagreements over toys, materials, space, and social roles. Though some conflict is inevitable, many conflicts can be prevented by planning the program so there are plenty of play choices and ample time and space to carry them out. Adults can also set a positive social tone by warmly responding to children's needs and by participating in play as children's partners.

Examples of children

Dealing with social conflict

- Myles and Elliot both make a plan to go to the block area. They each have an idea about what they would like to build; however, both of their plans include using the same ramp-like block. After they spend several minutes arguing over who should get the block first, they decide to abandon their efforts to build. Their new plan is to go to the art area, sit side by side, and draw what their buildings would have looked like if they could have agreed.
- Dylan puts a broom between his legs and "gallops" over to the art area. He sets the broom down and begins playing with play dough. After ten minutes Tamika picks up the broom. Dylan screams, "I'm not done with that yet." "Oops," she says, dropping it back on the floor.
- Lauren, Noelle, and Meghan are playing "mommy" with storybooks and doll babies inside a block enclosure. Ben asks to join them and cries when they say no. After they squabble among themselves for a few minutes, a teacher initiates a problem-solving discussion. Eventually, all the children agree to a solution: Ben can play, if he will be one of the babies.

Ways to support children in dealing with social conflict

As you help children resolve problems, use the six steps in conflict resolution to mediate the dispute:

- **Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.** Place yourself between the children, on their level. Use a calm voice and gentle touch. Remain neutral rather than take sides.

- **Acknowledge children's feelings.** ("You look really upset.") Let children know you need to hold any object in question. ("I am going to hold this while we talk about what to do.")

- **Gather information.** ("What's the problem?")

- **Restate the problem.** ("So the problem is....")

- **Ask for ideas for solutions** ("What can we do to solve this problem?"), and choose one together.

- **Be prepared to give follow-up support.**

Acknowledge that children have found a solution themselves ("You solved the problem!"), and stay near the children.

Remember that these six steps are like a box of tools. You may not need to use every tool in every conflict, and you may not use them in the same sequence. Use any or all the steps as needed to encourage children to resolve problems. Eventually, children will carry out all or part of this process independently.

When a conflict among children occurs, resolve to remain neutral.

In the last of the examples on the previous page, the girls want privacy and Ben is upset. Both are real and valid feelings. The teacher opens her dialogue with the children by making acknowledging comments that indicate she understands and accepts each child's feelings and point of view, and that she will not be taking sides. Be sure to continue to remain neutral as you carry out the six steps in mediation described above.



After a teacher's gentle acknowledgment, this boy empties out his feelings. Though he may be more upset for a few minutes, he will soon be calmer and ready to consider what to do about the problem.

Trust that, with your support, even young children can successfully identify their own feelings, consider the feelings of others, and work together to a satisfying end result.

If you approach conflict with a confident attitude, this will convey to children that problems can be solved.

Accept children's ideas for solutions, even when they are not the ones you yourself may have chosen.

Children's solutions may not always seem fair or helpful from an adult's point of view. For example, children may not decide to divide materials equally or to allow an excluded child into a game. However, as long as the children involved have agreed to the solution, you will empower them by accepting their decisions.

Remember, all the strategies described in this booklet for supporting children's initiative and social relations are also strategies for preventing conflict.

By nurturing trusting relationships with and among children and by creating an environment in which children's feelings are recognized and accepted and their choices are valued, you will keep conflict to a minimum in your setting.



Friendships flourish and conflicts are reduced in settings that encourage children's plans and choices.



See the checklist, next, for a summary of what to do to encourage children's development in initiative and social relations.



Initiative and Social Relations Strategies: Checklist

☆ **Making and expressing choices, plans, and decisions**

- ___ Establish an option-rich environment and a consistent daily routine.
- ___ Express and maintain interest in the choices children make.
- ___ Give children time to make choices, plans, and decisions.
- ___ Encourage children to make choices and decisions throughout the day.

☆ **Solving problems encountered in play**

- ___ Encourage children to describe the problems they encounter.
- ___ Give children time to generate their own solutions.
- ___ Assist frustrated children.

☆ **Taking care of one's own needs**

- ___ Provide children with time to do things for themselves.
- ___ Encourage children to use common tools.
- ___ Support children's attempts to take care of their emotional needs.

☆ **Expressing feelings in words**

- ___ Establish and maintain a supportive environment.
- ___ Acknowledge and accept children's feelings.
- ___ Listen for the names children give to their feelings.
- ___ Talk with children about their concerns.
- ___ Encourage children to tell stories.

☆ **Participating in group routines**

- ___ Establish consistent group routines:
 - ___ High/Scope daily routine elements
 - ___ Group maintenance routines
 - ___ Reasonable expectations
- ___ Make active learning a part of group routines.
- ___ Focus on children's interests, intentions, and strengths.

☆ **Being sensitive to the feelings, interests, and needs of others**

- ___ Respond to children's feelings, interests, and needs.
- ___ Recognize and comment on children's sensitivities.
- ___ Support children's concerns for absent group members.

☆ **Building relationships with children and adults**

- ___ Establish supportive relations with children:
 - ___ Treat children with kindness.
 - ___ Have genuine conversations with children.
- ___ Maintain a stable group of children and adults.
- ___ Look for relationships between children.
- ___ Refer one child to another.



☆ **Creating and experiencing collaborative play**

- ___ Provide materials that encourage collaborative play, including the following:
 - **Heavy awkward things**, such as appliance boxes, logs, and boards, that require children to work together to move and position them.
 - **Large items that can be filled and emptied**, such as wagons, wheelbarrows, and tents.
 - **Water-related materials**, such as items for watering the garden, washing bikes and sand toys, soaping and scrubbing the art table, blowing bubbles, washing smocks and doll clothes, making a pond in the sandbox, floating boats, and playing in the rain.
 - **Real utensils and tools**, including mops and buckets, computers, hammers and nails.
 - **Dress-up clothes** and other pretend play materials and props.
- ___ Provide space for collaborative play.
- ___ Watch for children playing together.
- ___ Encourage children who play together to plan and recall together.
- ___ Allow time for collaborative play to evolve.
- ___ Form partnerships with emerging players.
- ___ Provide opportunities for collaborative play at small-group time.

☆ **Dealing with social conflict**

- ___ **Keep children's developmental characteristics in mind:**
 - ___ Acknowledge and talk about what each child is feeling.
 - ___ Engage children as active participants in the problem-solving process (rather than solve problems for them).
 - ___ Give children specific information.
- ___ **Maintain a supportive environment to keep conflicts at a minimum:**
 - ___ Maintain limits and expectations for behavior that are *developmentally appropriate*.
 - ___ Provide many choices for play.
 - ___ Establish and follow a consistent daily routine.
 - ___ Model respectful ways of interacting with others and using materials.
 - ___ Plan for transitions.
- ___ **Help children resolve conflicts when they arise:**
 - ___ *Step 1:* Approach the situation calmly.
 - ___ *Step 2:* Acknowledge children's feelings.
 - ___ *Step 3:* Gather information.
 - ___ *Step 4:* Restate the problem.
 - ___ *Step 5:* Ask for ideas for solutions, and choose one together.
 - ___ *Step 6:* Be prepared to give follow-up support.

High/Scope PRESCHOOL Key Experiences

Initiative and Social Relations

Build children's
social competence
through these
important learning
experiences!

Through the key experiences in **initiative and social relations**, young children are developing as **independent decision makers** who can make plans and carry them out and as **community members** who can form close relationships, play cooperatively, and show sensitivity and respect for others. They are becoming **socially competent individuals** who are successful in accomplishing their goals and relating to others. This booklet highlights strategies adults can use to support children in developing these key abilities. Children and teachers in a variety of High/Scope early childhood settings are featured.

Using this booklet and its companion video program, teachers and parents can learn to **recognize and support** the following nine High/Scope **key experiences in initiative and social relations**:

- ☆ Making and expressing choices, plans, and decisions
- ☆ Solving problems encountered in play
- ☆ Taking care of one's own needs
- ☆ Expressing feelings in words
- ☆ Participating in group routines
- ☆ Being sensitive to the feelings, interests, and needs of others
- ☆ Building relationships with children and adults
- ☆ Creating and experiencing collaborative play
- ☆ Dealing with social conflict

Learn from experienced teachers how to nurture and encourage the important abilities of **initiative and social relations**! A checklist of teacher strategies is included.



a division of High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

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www.highscope.org

ISBN 1-57379-16



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